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### SØRENSEN, Per K., Guntram HAZOD, in cooperation with Tsering GYALBO, Thundering Falcon: An Inquiry into the History and Cult of Khra-`brug. Tibet's First Buddhist Temple

Wien, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften/Tibetan Academy  
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## REFERENCES

*Thundering Falcon: An Inquiry into the History and Cult of Khra-`brug. Tibet's First Buddhist Temple*, Wien, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften/Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences of the Autonomous Region Tibet, 2005, 432 p.

- 1 *Thundering Falcon*, the second collaborative effort from the same research team that produced the excellent work, *Civilization at the Foot of Mount Sham-po*,<sup>1</sup> continues the work of Per Sørensen, Guntram Hazod and Tsering Gyalbo in the heartland of Tibetan culture in and around Yar-lung and 'Phyong-po. Taking Khra-`brug Temple as their jumping-off point, Sørensen *et al.* bring their immense historical and geographical knowledge to bear on various issues surrounding the temple, from its establishment to its place in both local and pan-Tibetan cultic traditions. The work is a resounding success, and will serve as standard reference for many in the field. It shares much in common with their first collaboration: the core of the work, a heavily annotated translation, is bracketed by an excellent introduction and by numerous appendices that could easily stand alone on their

own merits. The book also contains numerous photographs, maps, tables, the main text itself, a meticulous index, and an accompanying DVD.

- 2 *Thundering Falcon* is destined to become a standard reference for two main reasons. The first is its geographical value. In addition to an index of Tibetan personal names and Tibetan texts, along with an index of Sanskrit terms, the authors created a lengthy and very useful index of Tibetan place names. The index entries take the reader either to a relevant passage, or to one of the many excellent maps created by Hazod. The authors quite often name the exact coordinates of specific place, and the maps serve to contextualize this. The second reason *Thundering Falcon* will be of use to many readers is its encyclopaedic quality. The style of presentation—translation with heavy annotation—is very much along the model of Sørensen’s *Tibetan Buddhist Historiography: the Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies*.<sup>2</sup> As with *Tibetan Buddhist Historiography*, it is not so much the text that matters, but the extensive analysis and accompanying references in the footnotes. The footnotes contain enumerations of iconographic traditions and biographical sketches of many of the main figures in Tibetan history. To underline just a few examples, footnote 128 on p. 72 lists the Tibetan and Sanskrit names of the eight forms of Tara that protect from the eight dangers, and note 159 on p. 76 lists the eight medicine Buddhas. The footnotes to pages 83–87 contain informative biographical sketches of Atiṅpa and the early bKa’-dam-pa, along with sketches of the early dGe-lugs-pa and all of the Dalai Lamas. Indeed one gets the impression at times of reading an encyclopaedia/gazetteer masquerading as an annotated translation.
- 3 The core of the book is made up of annotated translations of six separate texts dealing with Khra’brug, or, to be precise, five annotated translations and one annotated synopsis. The style of annotation, in which there are sometimes footnotes to footnotes, will probably not win the book many general or casual readers, but the rewards for the specialist are immense. The main text is an early 20th century pilgrimage guide to Khra’brug (*Khra ’brug gi gnas bshad*), while the other texts are excerpts from the relevant sections of the *mKhas pa’i dga’ ston*, *rGyal po bka’ thang*, *bKa’ chems ka khol ma*, a retranslation of the Khra’brug Bell Inscription, and a synopsis of the *Tshangs pa mchod stod*, which is an offering text to Tshangs-pa dkar-po, the protective deity of Khra’brug. A facsimile of the pilgrimage guide is included in the book, and photographs of the offering text are found on the DVD that accompanies the book.
- 4 The treatment of six texts dealing with Khra’brug means that the same ground is often covered more than once. This is particularly interesting in the case of the founding legend of Khra’brug, in which a five headed serpent (*klu*) is slain by two priests, mTshe-mi and lCo, and replaced by a five “headed” *stūpa*. The various treatments of these narratives by the respective authors of the *Khra ’brug gnas bshad*, the *mKhas pa’i dga’ ston* and the *bKa’ chems ka khol ma* differ in significant ways that reveal some of the ideological imperatives of each text. In the *Khra ’brug gnas bshad*, for example, lCog-la and Tshi-mi are Srong-btsan sgam-po’s “emanationally created Mantrika-s” (*sngags-pa*), and Tshi-mi is further qualified as a Bon-po. The two priests manifest a *khyung* bird with razor sharp wings that cut off the five heads of the serpent. Its watery home subsequently dries up, leading to the erection of the five *stūpa* (pp. 56–58). In dPa’-bo gTsug-lag’s version of this foundation myth in the *mKhas pa’i dga’ ston*, however, the *sngags-pa*, Cog-la, and the Bon-po, Tshe-mi, respond to Srong-btsan sgam-po’s announcement that he will reward anyone who is able to “tame” the five headed serpent. First the Bon-po, Tshe-mi, fails in his attempt, and then defers to Cog-la, the *sngags-pa*, who succeeds in manifesting the

“Thundering Falcon” whose wings cut off the serpent’s heads (pp. 142-143). In the earliest recension the authors treat, that of the *bKa’ chems ka khol ma*, Tshe-mi and lCog-ro are two of three brothers, and the latter’s two sons, the two A-ya Bon-po, Co-tshug and Sra-tshug, are the priests who transform themselves into the mythic bird that severs the serpent’s heads (pp. 155-156). Perhaps the most revealing departure in these three versions is that of dPa’-bo gTsug-lag, who turns Tshe-mi and lCo, who are, historically speaking, a prototype of ritual cooperation, into competitors in yet another instance of Bon v. Buddhist antagonism.

- 5 One of the book’s great strengths is its rich use of local history to complement the written sources. In the case of the foundation of Khra-’brug, the authors’ exploration of oral and clan history allows them to approach the historical origins of the foundation narrative. In the authors’ view, the two *sngags pa* or *bon po* are “borrowed” figures that were subsequently added to the foundation narrative. Behind them stands the interior minister (*nang-blon*) of Srong-btsan sgam-po, sGer Ral-pa-’dzin, and most importantly, the sGer/dGyer clan, who controlled the area including Khra-’brug. It is the legends of this local clan, the authors postulate, that spawned the narrative of the five-headed serpent and the thundering falcon (pp. 26-27).
- 6 Due to the fact that the authors analyzed the story three times, they obviously had to spread out their footnotes over these three separate translations. While it would be impractical to overload the first translation with notes, I would have welcomed footnote 2 on pp. 155-156 at the earliest appearance of the priests mTshe-mi and lCo in this context, as this note explains their origins and their cultural relevance with reference to several post-dynastic sources. Strangely, however, the authors do not refer to the appearance of these two in a famous Old Tibetan document from Dunhuang, PT 1038, which gives three theories concerning the origin of the Tibetan rulers. According to the third theory, the first ruler descended from heaven with six companions, among whom were the two Bon-po, mTshe and gCo (PT 1038, l. 15). Nonetheless, their footnote is otherwise very thorough and informative. It advances a fascinating hypothesis according to which the paired names of these priests were related somehow—the relationship is not made explicit—to the plant ephedra (*mtshe*) and the mineral cinnabar (mercuric sulfide) (*cog-la*), both of which are used as medicinal substances.
- 7 The book’s first appendix is a study by Sørensen and Hazod concerning the tradition of Tibet’s first royal temples. Dedicated to the memory of Michael Aris, this study improves upon Aris’ earlier work<sup>3</sup> (pp. 3-41) by examining numerous sources and turning a critical eye to the genesis of the various temple building schemas and narratives. Of particular interest, too, is their list of temples founded by the wives of Srong-btsan sgam-po (p. 199), and their analysis of the “Supine Demoness” painting kept in the Tibet Museum in Lhasa. On the topic of temple building as a civilizing force, Sørensen and Hazod’s interpretation is incisive and clear: “The stabilization of the symbolic centre through the suppression of the demonic territory correlates with the political demarcation of the empire, which finds expression in the formulation of the suppression of the Four Horns (*ru [bzhi] gnön*), and the pacification of the border as well as territories beyond the border (*mtha’ ’dul*, [*mtha’*] *yang ’dul*)” (p. 179). Concerning this schema of twelve suppressing temples (with the Jo-khang at the centre making thirteen), the authors conclude on a cautious note, stating that the schema can hardly predate the four horns, and likely took its form in the “post-bSam-yas period, and most realistically in the earliest post-dynastic period of the

11th century when there was renewed interest to remap Tibet's glorious imperial past" (p. 183).

- 8 The second appendix contains Hazod's extended essay, "The Falcon and the Lizard," which could stand on its own as a long article or a short monograph. It is a highly accomplished work that interweaves textual history with local tradition. Hazod maintains a meticulous attention to detail particularly in the case of historical geography. Hazod's treatment of the local deities and the protector deities of Khra-'brug builds on his growing body of work on protectors and mountain deities,<sup>4</sup> and aspects of his analysis look like initial steps toward an encompassing theory. On p. 275 n. 85, for example, Hazod writes that Tshangs-pa dkar-po was identified with the heavenly god gNam-the dkar-po. We further learn that Pe-har is also named gNam-the dkar-po (p. 276), and that Tshangs-pa Dung gi thor tshugs-can was a name for both gNyan-chen thang-lha and the name of a form of the Zhang-Zhung god Nyi-pang-sad, who is further associated with Ti-se (p. 276 n. 88). Hazod further makes the etymological argument that Tshangs-pa is connected with the gTsang-po River, linking the god Tshangs-pa with Ti-se and with the gTsang mountain god gTsang-lha Phudar (p. 275 n. 85). On page 260, Hazod equates the ancient Yar-lung goddess Yar-mo thangnga with Khu-bza' khu-ma, the mother of the mountain god Yar-lha sham-po. Hazod relates this goddess to a "great mother" figure, which sometimes appears in narratives as an old woman who "makes false interpretations or strange prophetic statements, which bring about an important turning point in the mythical events" (p. 250). I present these examples not to dispute the details of overlapping names and iconography—for these are not at all unusual—but to point out that Hazod's analysis seems to steer us toward a unifying view of Tibetan divinities, in which all the gods seem to be reflections of one another within a symbolic matrix. Whether or not there is an Indic ethic behind this, which would have all the gods be emanations of an earlier god, such as the "Great Mother" or some original heavenly god such as gNam-lha dkar-po, Hazod does not make explicit.
- 9 Appendix three contains three tables. The first is a historical timeline of Yar-lung and Khra-'brug. Though undoubtedly one of the most thorough and useful timelines of Tibetan history yet produced, it is marred by a tendency to gloss over without comment, or at least purport to solve very quickly, some very complex issues that in my view deserved greater attention. Among these are the dates for Mu-ne bTsan-po's reign, Khri lDe-srong-btsan's reign and the placement of the *'Phang thang maCatalogue* in the reign of Khri lDe-srong-btsan. Such issues of royal succession are far too complex to discuss here, however, and a close examination of all of these dates would be more appropriate elsewhere.
- 10 The second table of appendix three, an annotated lineage of the Yar-lung Jo-bo, is essentially a short history of the 'Od-srung lineage. Together with Hazod's earlier work on the Yum-brtan lineage in *Civilization at the Foot of Mount Sham-Po*, this represents a significant addition to the growing body of literature on the "period of fragments," the "rise from the ashes," and the early *phyi-dar*. Though there are still some unresolved chronological issues concerning this period, if research continues to advance at its current pace it will soon become difficult to refer to it as a "dark age."
- 11 The last table of appendix three lists temples of Yar-lung and 'Phyong-po whose foundation or renovation is attributed to emerging monastic groups in the early *phyi-dar*. Appendix four contains excellent architectural drawings of Khra-'brug by Reinhard Herdick.

- 12 There are a few small problems with consistency that the authors would do well to attend to in their next collaboration. Tibetan words are sometimes pluralized with an “s”, as in “Tshal-pas,” and other times with an “-s,” as in “Bya-sa-pa-s,” and sometimes left as they stand, as in “Khra-brug-pa” (all on p. 29). While I personally prefer the last option, finding the first potentially misleading and the second cumbersome, what matters here is consistency. This, however, is a minor problem, and belongs to the same genre as the typographical errors found throughout the work, which, as is often the case with typographical errors, may not be the fault of the authors themselves.
- 13 One other matter of consistency concerns the translation of the Tibetan term *gnyan-po gsang-ba*, commonly used to refer to the first Buddhist objects that fell into the hands of the Tibetan royal line. On page 14, it is rendered “awesome objects of veneration,” while on p. 45 n. 23 it is “awesome secret,” and on p. 217 it is “wrathful secret.” On p. 229, it is “awesome secret of the Teaching,” but a footnote adds some nuance: “As we can see from the history of the following kings [i.e., after Tho-tho-ri], the *gnyan po gsang ba* assumed the position of an ancestral spirit (*gnyan*).”
- 14 There were a few unfortunate oversights in an otherwise excellent bibliography: Gruschke 1997 (cited on p. 55 n. 60) and Gruschke 2004 (cited on p. 53 n. 35) do not appear in the bibliography, and neither does Yamaguchi 1983 (cited on p. 226 n. 14).
- 15 To conclude, the book’s errors and oversights are quite minor, and matter little when weighed against its numerous contributions to our understanding of the intersecting vectors of ritual, territory and political power at an early stage in Tibet’s history. The collaboration between Sørensen, Hazod and Gyalbo has now produced two excellent books, and we can only hope that their forthcoming book on Tshal Gung-thang<sup>5</sup> will live up to the high standards they have set themselves.

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## NOTES

1. T. Gyalbo, G. Hazod and P. K. Sørensen, *Civilization at the Foot of Mount Sham-Po: The Royal House of lHa Bug-Pa-Can and the History of g.Ya'-Bzang* (Wien, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000).
2. P.K. Sørensen, *Tibetan Buddhist Historiography: The Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies* (Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 1994).
3. M. Aris, *Bhutan. The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom* (Warminster, Aris and Phillips, 1979).
4. H. Diemberger and G. Hazod, “Animal sacrifices and mountain deities in southern Tibet. mythology, rituals and politics”, in S. G. Karmay and P. Sagant (éd.), *Les Habitants du Toit du Monde* (Nanterre, Société d’Ethnologie, 1997), pp. 261-279; G. Hazod, “bKra shis ’od ’bar. On the history of the religious protector of the Bo Dong Pa”, in A. M. Blondeau (éd.), *Tibetan Mountain Deities, Their Cults and Representations. Papers Presented at a Panel of the 7th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Graz 1995* (Wien, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1998), pp. 57-78; G. Hazod, “King Mer Khe. A historical note on the legend of origin of the Byang sTag lung pa protector rGyal po Mer Khe”, in *PIATS X, Oxford 2003* (Leiden, Brill, forthcoming).

5. P.K. Sørensen, G. Hazod and T. Gyalbo, *Rulers of the Celestial Plain. Ecclesiastic and Secular Hegemony in Medieval Tibet. A Study of Tshal Gung-thang* (Vienna, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, forthcoming).